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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: MAR 2002

Washington, D. C.
Office of the Director

24 November 1954

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Reconnaissance

You are familiar with the large gaps in our Intelligence coverage of the Soviet Union which prevent us from obtaining adequate knowledge of Soviet intentions and, in important respects, of Soviet capabilities; and in particular, with respect to their capabilities and intentions to launch nuclear attacks on the United States. You are familiar, too, with the current and growing difficulties in the way of filling those gaps by the more classic means.

In my considered judgment, as well as that of the other members of the Intelligence Community, there is not the prospect of gaining this vital Intelligence without the conduct of systematic and repeated air reconnaissance over the Soviet Union itself. (Even this does not assure adequacy, but will certainly provide a much closer approach to adequacy.) The members of the Doolittle Committee in their report, expressed their belief that every known technique should be used and new ones developed to increase our Intelligence by high altitude photographic reconnaissance and other means, and that no price would be too high to pay for the knowledge to be derived therefrom. Thus, there is a definite and urgent National requirement for photographic and electronic reconnaissance overflights of the Soviet Bloc.

While we have been considering the problem for a long time (you may recall a discussion I had with you some months ago concerning overflights), Dr. James R. Killian, Jr., and members of Project 3, Technological Capabilities Panel, Office of Defense Mobilization, (E. H. Land, James G. Baker, Joseph W. Kennedy, Edward M. Purcell and John W. Tukey) have independently arrived

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at essentially the same conclusion. I have also discussed it with Secretary Talbott and with General Twining. We are all agreed that the requirement is an urgent one and that with suitable direction and support, it is feasible of accomplishment with minimum risk.

An existing Air Force aircraft type (the Canberra) is considered capable of modification to give it a ceiling of around 65,000 feet. At such an altitude now, the expectation that it would be detected is very low indeed, and the possibility that it would be intercepted and shot down is practically nil. The possibility of forced landing in enemy territory exists, but the chances of that are low. The repercussions of its falling into enemy hands can be mitigated if the aircraft should be manned by non-official U.S. personnel. To the extent practicable, we would try to man the aircraft with Poles or other non-U.S. nationals. The aircraft itself, if not completely destroyed, would bear no markings that would clearly identify its origin. (The Canberra itself is nearly identical with its British prototype.)

As a follow-on to the Canberra, we would simultaneously proceed with the procurement of specially designed reconnaissance aircraft with more advanced performance characteristics, that would take it to around 70,000 feet.

In addition to this high altitude day reconnaissance, we would resort to very low altitude reconnaissance at night with appropriate aircraft. Whereas the night reconnaissance would not provide a substitute for the high altitude day photography, nevertheless it would give an opportunity for supplementary reconnaissance, exploiting such technical developments as infrared photography and certain electronics techniques.

Of course, not even the 70,000 foot opportunity will be of indefinite duration. Our problem will be one of keeping ahead and creating new opportunities as the old disappear.

We are all agreed also that, in order to attain a status of readiness to launch these flights as early as

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desired, and then to conduct them, extraordinary procedures would have to be adopted for aircraft, crew and equipment procurement, testing, training, and for operations. This would require the greatest possible collaboration between the Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency.

I recommend that you:

a. Approve the existence of a National requirement for the above reconnaissance overflights.

b. By approval of this document, direct the Secretary of the Air Force and the Director of Central Intelligence to establish as a matter of urgency, a collaborative project for the procurement and testing of the necessary aircraft and equipment, and for the procurement and training of the necessary crews (such crews to be [redacted] to the extent practicable). The Director of Central Intelligence is also hereby authorized to obligate in Fiscal Year 1955 an amount not to exceed [redacted] from the [redacted] for aircraft procurement, and it is expected as the project develops additional authority will be sought by him for funds for maintenance, training, operations, etc.

c. By approval of this document, direct the Secretary of the Air Force and the Director of Central Intelligence, subject to appropriate policy guidance as directed, to conduct at the earliest possible date, the reconnaissance overflights, and to do so in such a way as to reduce the risk of involvement of the U.S. to the minimum practicable.

(Signed)

ALLEN W. DULLES
Director

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